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DIVISIONS OF THE DECALOGUE.

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New York.

The Ten Commandments stand alone in the sacred volume. Originally pronounced by God himself from Sinai amid blackness and tempest and lightning-flashes, they were afterwards inscribed by his own hand on tables of stone, and when these were dashed in pieces by Moses, on a fitting occasion they were renewed by their divine author in the same way as before. Afterwards they were laid up in the ark of the covenant beneath the mercy-seat in the most holy place. Their internal excellence corresponds to this outward honor bestowed upon them. They are at the same time the oldest and the best code of human duty. They are so complete and comprehensive as to leave nothing to desire. And they are justly called by Ewald the granite substratum of the whole Bible.

The name by which the Decalogue is most distinctly mentioned in the Pentateuch is that of the ten words (Exod. xxxiv. 28; Deut. iv. 13; x. 4). Hence arise two questions, not without interest to the serious student. What are these ten words precisely? i. e., where do they begin and end, and how are they discriminated one from another? and how were they distributed on the two tables which first received them?

I. WHAT ARE THE TEN WORDS?

To most Protestants of our day this question seems to answer itself. All who have been trained in any of the Reformed churches have been accustomed from infancy to see in their catechisms and in tablets on church walls one and the same series of commandments, each of which in all cases bears the same numerical designation; and it does not occur to them that there is any other way of viewing the matter. Yet in fact there are, and there have been almost from the beginning, diverse methods of making out the number ten.

1. *The Talmudic.* This is found in the Targum of Jonathan ben Uzziel, or Pseudo-Jonathan, who lived in the fifth century of our era. It is contained also in the Talmud (*Makkoth*, xxiv. a). It was advocated by the learned Aben Ezra, in his *Commentary*, and by the still more learned Maimonides (*Sepher-Hammizroth*) and is now the common opinion of the Jews. According to it what is usually considered the preface to the whole, "I am Jehovah thy God which brought thee out of the land of Egypt" is made the first commandment, since these words, they say, imply the obligation to believe on God as the most perfect of all beings. Then they put verses 3-6 of the chapter into what they called the second command, including the recognition of God's unity and the prohibition of idol worship. The other eight precepts conform to the ordinary arrangement. It is somewhat remarkable that the chief peculiarity of this system—its use of the preface—is to be found in a treatise of Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444) against Julian, in which he gives the second command as "Thou shalt have no strange gods beside me: thou shalt not make to thyself an idol." It was also maintained by the learned Peter Martyr in his *Loci Communes*. The obvious objections to this view are that verse 2 has in no respect or degree the form of a precept, and that it has

vastly more force when considered as a preliminary statement of a double import, first as giving the special ground for not accepting any other gods beside Jehovah, and secondly as furnishing the general presupposition of the law and the ground of its obligation, viz., the nature of God and his gracious dealing with men as their deliverer. Nor is there any reason for regarding verses 3-6 as one commandment. For they contain two points essentially distinct, viz., *whom* we are to worship, and *how* it is to be done. When Aaron made the golden calf at the foot of Sinai, and when Jeroboam instituted a similar bovine worship at Bethel and at Dan, the second command was violated but not the first, for it was Jehovah that was worshiped, though in a way that he abhorred. It was not until the great apostasy under Ahab and Jezebel that Jehovah was dethroned, and the object as well as the form of worship was overthrown by king and people running mad after Baal. Experience, therefore, as well as the nature of the case, shows that the verses following the preface contain two separate commandments which ought not to be confounded. It should be mentioned, however, that in the greater number of printed editions and manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible the commandments from the third to the tenth are separated by a *Pe* or a *Samech*, which are used to mark the smaller divisions of a passage, yet neither of these letters occurs in verses 2-6, which, of course, implies that these verses treat of but one subject. This fact, however, only shows how early the Jewish view of the matter originated.

2. *The Augustinian.* The great Latin father agreed with the Jews in confounding polytheism and idolatry, or as he said, "The command ('Thou shalt have no other gods but me') is more perfectly explained when images are forbidden to be worshiped." And he insisted that the prohibition of making or serving an idol was not a new precept, but simply an expansion or enforcement of the first injunction. But as he regarded the words, "I am the Lord thy God, etc.," as a preface, it was necessary in some way to make good the number ten. This he did by dividing the last command into two—one forbidding to covet our neighbor's wife, the other to covet his house, field, manservant, etc. (He follows the order given in Deut. v. 21.) He did this on the ground that the *cupido impurae voluptatis* is a distinct offense from the *cupido impuri lucri*. In this he was followed by Beda and by Peter Lombard, and the custom became common in the Latin communion. It was formally sanctioned by the Council of Trent and appears in their catechism, only that the division of the precept concerning coveting follows the order of Exodus and makes the ninth command to prohibit coveting our neighbor's house, and the tenth his wife and servant, etc. The same thing is done in Luther's *Kleiner Catechismus*. A peculiarity of this small catechism, which it shares with the small Tridentine catechism, has given rise to a very unjust aspersion on the Roman church. Both these catechisms give nearly all the commandments in a condensed or abridged form, and hence we read in both that the first command is, *Thou shalt have no other gods*, and the second is, *Thou shalt not take the name of thy God in vain*. Hence the late Dr. Ashbel Green in his *Lectures on the Shorter Catechism* (II. 250) says, "You are aware that the Papists dispense with the second commandment, because it manifestly prohibits their use of images." So Dr. A. A. Hodge, in his admirable commentary on the Confession of Faith, says of the Romish church that she "unites the first and second commandments together in order to make it appear that only the worship of false gods and images of them are forbidden, while the images of the true God and of

saints are not excluded from the instruments of worship" (p. 342). But I think it is clear that both these statements are incorrect. (1) The blending of the first command and the second into one was an old Jewish usage. (2) It was introduced into the Christian church by Augustine, certainly without any dogmatic aim. (3) The full text of both precepts is given in the larger symbols of the Roman church. (4) If the charge justly lies against the Romanists, it equally lies against the Lutherans, which is simply absurd. (5) An infelicitous abridgment of the Decalogue is not fairly regarded and treated as a designed and criminal mutilation of its substance. Rome has vulnerable points enough, and it is unwise to strike a blow where it can so easily be warded off. All that can justly be charged against the Romanists and Lutherans is not that they have mutilated the law of God, but that the form in which they state it in their shorter catechisms has the effect of concealing important parts of it from those who have access only to these catechisms. And while this is greatly to be regretted, it furnishes no ground for harsh and hostile criticisms, as if a deliberate purpose had been cherished to keep out of view integral portions of the great statute announced from Sinai.

That the tenth commandment cannot properly be divided seems to be self-evident. It is one and the same evil desire that is forbidden, however varied its objects. Augustine's distinction is wire-drawn and fallacious, for the *cupido* of the woman is condemned for precisely the same reason that the *cupido* of the house is, viz., because in each case that which is coveted belongs to another. A *cupido* which is wrong in its own nature is indeed condemned, but it is by another commandment. Besides, on two occasions Paul, in the Epistle to the Romans (VII. 7; XIII. 9), quotes this command, but in each case without an object attached, simply "Thou shalt not covet," which could hardly have been done, had he considered the command twofold.

3. *The Hellenistic.* This goes as far back as Josephus and Philo. The former (Ant. III. v. 5) says, "The first commandment teaches us that there is but one God, and that we ought to worship him only. The second commands us not to make the image of any living creature to worship it." And so he goes through the decade, ending with the words, "The tenth, that we must not admit of the desire of anything that is another's." The latter, in his treatise *De Decalogo*, makes substantially the same statement, following what appears to have been the received division of that day. Origen in his eighth Homily on Genesis notices the different views that were held on the subject, and says expressly that the words "I am the Lord thy God which brought thee out of the land of Egypt" are not a part of the commandment. He also maintains that the first command is, "Thou shalt have no other gods but me," and the second, "Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image, etc.," and proceeds at some length to elaborate the distinction between them. And he urges that this distinction is necessary in order to maintain the number ten, showing that he knew nothing of the method of completing that number by dividing the prohibition of coveting into two parts. The same thing appears in a poem of Gregory Nazianzen (325-389) entitled *The Decalogue of Moses*, in which are found these lines.

These ten laws Moses formerly engraved on tables
Of stone; but do thou engrave them on thy heart.
Thou shalt not know another God, since worship belongs to me.
Thou shalt not make a vain statue, a lifeless image.

Thou shalt not call on the great God in vain.
 Keep all Sabbaths, the sublime and the shadowy.
 Happy he who renders to his parents due honor.
 Flee the crime of murder, and of a foreign
 Bed ; evil minded theft, and witness
 False, and the desire of another's, the seed of death.

In this he was followed by Jerome (345-420) who calls him his master, and who, in his commentary on Ephes. vi. 2, cites Exod. xx. 4-6, calling these words the second commandment. So Clement of Alexandria (Stromata vi.) states the teaching of the second word to be that men ought not to confer the august power of God upon things created and vain which human artificers have made, among which "He that is" is not to be ranked.

This arrangement of the Decalogue, under the overshadowing influence of Augustine, appears to have been quite forgotten in the Western church, but was revived by Calvin in his Institutes, 1536. From him it spread into all the Reformed churches, and accordingly is found in the English Book of Common Prayer, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Westminster standards. It seems always to have maintained itself in the Greek church, and is now found in the Orthodox Confession of the Eastern church, drawn up by Mogilas in 1643, and in the Longer Catechism of the same church, prepared by Philaret and adopted by the Most Holy Synod in 1839. There can hardly be a doubt that this is the correct statement of the Ten Words of Moses. It is simple, natural and complete. It makes no superfluous division, nor does it confound and blend what ought to be distinguished. It gives this wonderful summary of human duty in a way befitting its origin and its excellence.

II. WHAT IS THE PROPER DISTRIBUTION OF THE TEN WORDS ?

This is a question not so easily answered as the foregoing, inasmuch as there is really room for a wide difference of opinion. The fact that the Ten Words were originally written on two tables of stone suggested what indeed is apparent from the nature of the precepts themselves, that they were divided into two parts, one stating man's duty to God, the other his duty to his fellow men. This raised the question where the line should be drawn, to which three answers were given, one dividing the ten into three and seven, another into four and six, while a third made two pentads.

1. The plan of distributing them into *Three and Seven* was a conceit of Augustine's, after he had made the first two commandments into one. For thus bringing those that relate to piety into three, he said it was better to separate them from the remaining seven, "inasmuch as to persons who diligently look into the matter, those which appertain to God seem to insinuate the Trinity." Upon which Calvin appropriately says in his comment on Exodus xx. 12, "A frivolous reason is assigned by Augustine why they comprised the First Table in three commandments, viz., that believers might learn to worship God in the Trinity, and thus to adore God in three persons. By inconsiderately trifling with such subtleties men have exposed God's law to the mockeries of the ungodly." It is hard to believe that even to one person in a thousand a threefold division of the first table would suggest the thought of the Trinity, and still harder to believe that his faith in the doctrine would receive any increase of strength from such a suggestion.

2. The division into *Four and Six* was stoutly defended by Calvin, who insists that the first four precepts express the piety we owe to God and the last six the equity due to our neighbor. With him, therefore, the Second Table begins with the fifth command, "Honor thy father, etc." He refutes the course of those who would put this precept in the First Table as teaching a sort of natural piety, by appealing to the authority of our Lord who, he says, put an end to any dispute on the point, since in Matt. XIX. 19 he enumerates among the precepts of the Second Table this, that children should obey their parents. And to the objection made by some that the Apostle Paul, when in Rom. XIII. 9 he was giving the sum of the Second Table, omitted to mention the fifth commandment, he replies that this omission was designedly made because the whole context implied the precept, its express aim being to teach the authority due to kings and magistrates. In his commentary on Romans he gives the additional answer that the precept is included in the phrase, "And if there be any other commandment." His general ground of objection is that the course he opposes tends to confound the *religionis et caritatis distinctionem*, which, indeed, were it well founded, would be decisive; for the ultimate basis of all moral obligation is our duty to God, and if this be attenuated the sheet-anchor of ethics is gone.

Others sustain this division by an appeal to Ephes. VI. 2, where the fifth commandment is said to be "the first with promise," which it is said must mean the first in the Second Table, inasmuch as there is a promise attached to the second commandment. But the answer is obvious that the promise in the latter is of a general nature, having reference to the Decalogue as a whole, and stands in no particular relation to the precept which precedes it, so that really the fifth precept is *πρώτη ἐν ἐπαγγελίᾳ*, first in point of promise. It has this character, whether it be joined to those that go before it or to those that follow after it. Others meet the argument by urging that the phrase should be rendered, not "the first commandment," but "a prime, i. e., a main precept in a promise." But this, although a possible rendering of the original, is not very natural, nor suited to the connection.

3. *Five and Five.* The earliest mention of this is in Josephus (Ant. III. v. 8) who says that Moses showed the people "the two tables with the commandments engraven upon them, five upon each table; and the writing was by the hand of God." With him agrees Philo, who divides the whole into two pentads. And so Irenæus (II. XXIV. 4), "Each table which Moses received from God contained five commandments." The basis of this distribution is thus given by Plumtree (Smith, Bible Dic. 3209), "Instead of duties toward God and duties toward our neighbors, we must think of the First Table as containing all that belonged to the *εἰσέβεια* of the Greeks, to the *pietas* of the Romans, duties, i. e., with no corresponding rights, while the second deals with duties which involve rights, and come therefore under the head of *justitia*. The duty of honoring, i. e., supporting, parents came under the former head. As soon as the son was capable of it and the parents required it, it was an absolute unconditional duty. His right to any maintenance from them had ceased. He owed them reverence as he owed it to his Father in heaven (Heb. XII. 9). He was to show piety (*εἰσέβειν*) to them (1 Tim. v. 4). What made the 'Corban' casuistry of the scribes so specially evil was that it was in this way a sin against the piety of the First Table, not merely against the lower obligations of the second." To the same effect Oehler (Theol. of the Old Test., § 80) observes, "If in Leviticus (XIX. 32), 'Thou shalt

rise up before the hoary head, and honor the face of the old man and fear thy God,' and in Exodus (XXII. 27), 'Thou shalt not curse God, nor revile the ruler of thy people,' reverence to princes and to the aged is deduced from the honor due to God, the same thing must be still more true of honor to parents, since all authority of superiors is originally derived from that of the father." So Luther said (Expos. of the Decal., 1518), "Ideo istud praeceptum post praecepta primae tabulae, quia est de illis qui sunt vicarii Dei. Quare sicut Deus colendus est honore, ita et vicarius ejus."

We may then safely adopt this distribution of the Ten Words as the earliest and the best. It agrees with the definitive and rounded character of the series, and if the number *ten* were adopted, as seems reasonable, both from the completeness of that number and also because it would make it easy to remember by counting the precepts on the fingers, the most natural division of ten is into two equal parts, each embracing a like series of precepts, and each implying the other. Nor is the added gain small from the dignity thus given to the fifth commandment, which is the basis of all human society, and which, if obeyed, sheds its beneficent influence over every rank and condition, and proves an equal blessing to the church and to the state. To the child, so long as he is a child, the parent stands in the place of God, and by the steadfast usage of our own tongue filial obedience is filial piety.* The family has a religious as well as an ethical constitution, and the due performance of its duties is not merely indirectly, as in the Second Table, but directly and primarily, as in the First, an expression of homage to God over all.

* It is worthy of note that this phrase is peculiar. We never read of parental piety or fraternal piety. The term is applied only to what a child owes or performs to its parents as the representatives of God.